

Tom: For better or worse this is
it. Thanks so much for your help.
John Glenn

A HISTORY OF VASQUEZ ROCKS
AND VICINITY

With Recommendations for the
Development of Vasquez Rocks
as a County Park

by John M. Glenn

DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

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INTRODUCTION

A history of Vasquez Rocks Park, located some forty-nine miles north of Los Angeles Civic Center near the town of Agua Dulce between Escondido Canyon Road and the Antelope Valley Freeway, must be more than the story of the rocks themselves.

The first settlers at Vasquez Rocks, the Indians, were affected drastically by the coming of the Spaniards, so it is necessary to tell something of the Missions in trying to reconstruct the life of these Indians during and after their sojourn at Vasquez Rocks. Those who followed the Indians were principally miners attracted to the area by its mineral wealth. With that in mind it becomes necessary to tell something of the immediate surroundings of the park site: Acton, Newhall, Placerita, Soledad, Mint and Tick Canyons.

With heavy industry and shipping excepted, the history of Vasquez Rocks Park has most of the ingredients found in the history of California, outside its great cities. The rocks have witnessed the coming of the Indian, the Spaniard and the American. Their story includes ranchers, beekeepers, small farmers, miners, oilmen, railroad builders, missionaries and conquerors, cowboys and badmen, motion pictures and television, and, finally, the urge of the city dweller to seek recreation in natural surroundings that inspire wonder.

To capture the essence of Vasquez Rocks is to go back in time to when the land itself was beginning to take shape and to roam at will to and away from the rocks in much the same way that those who came to know them had done for thousands of years.

CHAPTER I: THE LAND IS FORMED

Between the upper Eocene and lower Miocene periods, when deer were beginning to grow horns and elephants trunks, the spectacular outcropping of coarse yellow-gray sandstone beds that was to become known as Vasquez Rocks was formed. Violent earth movement thrust the rock formations through the crust of the earth, leaving them slanting at a magnetic angle to the northeast. These outcroppings, thirty to forty feet high, dip at angles of forty to forty-five degrees to the southwest.¹

Several chapters of the book of creation are written in the complex geological jumble that is the Vasquez Rocks series. Earth movement is recorded in the "northeast-treading folds modified by many cross-faults and longitudinal faults." Competent volcanic rocks have been integrated with incompetent sedimentary sequences. "The dominantly sedimentary nonmarine Miocene Tick Canyon and Mint Canyon formations unconformably overlap the distorted Vasquez beds."²

Late Eocene to late Miocene time is represented by an aggregate thickness of nearly 14,000 feet of nonmarine fluviatile and lacustrine sediments and interbedded volcanic rocks comprising the Vasquez, Tick Canyon, and Mint Canyon formations.³

Thomas E. Gay Jr. reports the Vasquez Rocks series, a 9,000-foot section of nonmarine siltstone, sandstone, and

conglomerate, with subordinate breccia, limestone, tuff and gypsiferous and borate-bearing layers, has tentatively been assigned an Oligocene age.⁴ That is, midway between the Eocene and Miocene, or between twenty and forty-five million years ago.

Of the Tick Canyon area, where borax mining was to be so important to settlers of Vasquez Rocks early in this century, Gay states:

It seems probable that the original site of the deposit (borates) was a marsh containing marl and calc tufa with mud and considerable organic growth, and that later waters charged with boracic acid flowed into the basin and converted the carbonate of lime into the borate.... The origin of the boric acid is presumably volcanic. The strongly monomineralic character of the deposit and lack of mixed alkali salts indicate that it was not formed by evaporation of desert lake waters.⁵

Eons of shifting, sifting, heating and cooling produced not only the sole deposit of borates in Los Angeles County extensive enough to be mined but sprinkled gold, titanium, copper, plagioclase feldspar, graphite, gypsum, soapstone, and other valuable minerals throughout the area.

An example of the variety of geological development that exists there is that while no oil is known to have been produced from Oligocene sediments in Los Angeles County⁶ -- and much of the area around Vasquez Rocks is Oligocene sediment -- the first producing oil well in the State of California was brought in about fifteen miles to the west at Newhall.⁷

Vasquez Rocks is separated from the Sierra Pelona

Valley by Elkhorn Fault with Vasquez formation southeast of the fault and terrace and alluvial deposits to the northwest. The fault probably influences water conditions. There is relatively little water in wells to the south of the fault but adequate water is found to the north.⁸

It is near one of the best water wells, Agua Dulce springs, that the first record of man was found at Vasquez Rocks.

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³Recreation and Parks, Soil Types.

⁴Gay, Mines, p. 481.

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⁶Ibid., 481.

⁷A. B. Perkins, "The Story of Our Valley," The Newhall Signal and Saugus Enterprise, August 26, 1954.

⁸Recreation and Parks, Soil Types.

CHAPTER II: THE FIRST INHABITANTS

Artifacts found at the 745-acre park site indicate the continued presence of Indians, called Alliklik, for about 2,000 years from 200 B.C. to the late 1700s A.D., or the beginning of the Spanish period in California.¹

Twenty-one of the twenty-four Indian sites discovered before the current archaeological activity are within the park boundaries, situated mainly around the Agua Dulce springs near the park's western boundary. "The year-around source of water supplied by the springs provided the major basis for the long-term aboriginal settlement at this locality."²

Excavation uncovered Indian burial grounds with stone bowls, tools, and weapons. It was revealed that the Indians lived under the protection of the rocks and carried on trade with the roving Indians from the coast and the desert.³

The dig was part of the research of Herrick E. Hanks of the Department of Anthropology at San Fernando Valley State College and Thomas F. King, chief archaeologist at UCLA, in conjunction with Dr. Charles Rozaire, curator of archaeology at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. This research was under the auspices of the County Department of Recreation and Parks.

Chester King of UCLA is heading current archaeological work on the site.

Very little is known about the Indians called Alliklik. A. L. Kroeber, in his Handbook of the Indians of California, writes only one paragraph about them.

Bordering the Chumash, on the Upper Santa Clara River, there lived a Shoshonean tribe that was probably of Serrano affinities, although the two or three words preserved of their speech allow of no very certain determination. They can not have been numerous. Taken to San Fernando or San Buenaventura missions, they dwindled rapidly, and the few survivors seem to have been so thrown in and intermarried with people of other speech that their own language became extinct in a couple of generations.⁴

If we know little in particular of the Alliklik, there is enough general information available on California Indians to reconstruct their probable way of life and their probable destiny. Dark and short of stature, they...

had little, if anything in the way of political institutions....the basic structure was a patrilocal band, which might consist of a dozen families related through the father's line. They were not nomadic, but usually remained for generations within a specific area, exploiting the combination of resources.⁵

Each Alliklik village was autonomous with the chief coming from the predominant family. He was assisted by one from the lesser family. All that is known of those families is that there were two, the Coyote and the Mountain Lion.⁶

Evidence at Vasquez Rocks indicates that the Indians, probably never numbering more than 200 at any time during their 2,000-year stay, moved from one rock outcropping to another, never leaving the Vasquez Rocks area. The resources were sufficient to their small numbers and needs. Agua Dulce

springs provided adequate water. The area teemed with game of all kinds. Until very recently -- about the time of the completion of the Antelope Valley Freeway -- deer were still being hunted in and around the rocks. Jackrabbits and quail are still common to the park area.

Just to the north and west of the rocks is a plain of alluvial soil to a depth of about 300 feet, according to Thomas Asher, a former owner of part of the site. It is fertile enough to support any gathering or root digging activities of the Indians. Among the rocks "Indian barley," juniper and other varieties of edible and medicinal plants are still to be found. More varied vegetation is in nearby Escondido Canyon.

The rocks themselves provided shelter. Tipped as they are to the northeast, they gave shade during the hot summers, covered the Indians during occasional rainfall, blocked the wind, and during the winter reflected heat from fires built at their base. The smoke from these fires can still be seen on the rocks.

Having no calendar and no agriculture, the Indians recognized only two seasons, winter and summer. Without a written language, they left no books behind, yet -- in common with all men -- they wanted to record the important events of their lives. The rocks provided the broad canvas on which the record was kept. Although these pictographs have yet to be deciphered, they are still being found, especially on the

rocks close to Agua Dulce springs.

Descriptions by the Spanish of Shoshone Indians of the San Fernando Valley picture them as a generous and compassionate people who "made their meagre living by hunting wild game and gathering natural products in the proper seasons." Their diet was chiefly squirrels, gophers and acorn mush.⁷

In warm weather the men wore a buckskin breechclout and women a knee-length skirt. In winter both men and women wore robes or blankets made from twisted strips of rabbit skin. "They were accomplished craftsmen, the men showing special talent in producing objects in wood, stone, bone and shell."⁸ They also excelled in the making of colorful baskets, stone bowls, and chipped arrow-points and blades.⁹

Members of a particular clan or family worked in community, eating and dressing from the community's products.¹⁰

Members of the same clan could not marry. In the marriage custom, the important members of the suitor's clan gave gifts to the important members of the bride's clan. The gifts were ...abalone shell beads. The suitor gave the bride a rabbitskin cape and a small blanket.¹¹

Vasquez Rocks is located along the great trade trail to the Colorado River. Living along this trail which links the Mojave Desert with the Pacific Coast, the Alliklik became a trading tribe. Shards of Flagstaff black and white pottery, dating from the thirteenth century found in surrounding canyons, and three diorite three-quarter groove stone axes classed by John F. Herrington as possible Hohokam, or Pueblo, indicates

trade filtered through the Four Corners area -- Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico.¹²

Glass trade beads were found with large basal-notched spear points and small stone beads at Vasquez Rocks by Hanks and his party.¹³

Tobacco, called "chou", came down from Tejon packaged in grape leaves. A false obsidian, for arrow and spear heads, and yellow ochres and some other colors came from Grimes Canyon at its junction with Sycamore Canyon. From the coast, abalone and fish were traded.¹⁴

One significant difference between the Alliklik and neighboring tribes was the way the Alliklik dealt with death.

At Vasquez Rocks, pot holes or small caves used to hold calcined bones and beads, indicating cremation, so those Indians were definitely of the Desert or Mountain tribes and were not down here (Newhall). Most local (Newhall) burials have been flexed (body folded at hip and knees) with the personal kettles killed (broken usually through the bottom) and interred. Usually the head points toward Mt. San Cayetano, suggesting ritualistic significance here.¹⁵

Another difference was the language. The dialect near Newhall was Serrano while the Indians at Vasquez Rocks spoke a Southern California Uto-Aztecan language.¹⁶ The possibility arises that the Alliklik may not have been as closely related to Shoshonean tribes as previously supposed. Or maybe more than one tribe of Indians inhabited Vasquez Rocks at different times. Even their name, Alliklik, may be a misnomer. Recent evidence cited by Chester King suggests that Alliklik was

what other Indians called them, rather than what they called themselves. King says "Alliklik" is a Chumash word meaning "stammerer" or, perhaps, "grunter."¹⁷

Whatever is to be learned of the Alliklik, it will be learned at Vasquez Rocks, the only known site formerly inhabited by these Indians,¹⁸ and according to King, part of one of the largest rancherias he has encountered.

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³Martha Willman, "Topanga Canyon Excavations Yield Centuries-Old Items," Los Angeles Times, April 26, 1970.

⁴Alfred Louis Kroeber, Handbook of the Indians of California (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925) pp. 613-614.

⁵Warren A. Beck and David A. Williams, California (New York and Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1972) p. 25.

⁶Perkins, "Our Valley," April 15, 1954.

⁷Fr. Francis J. Weber, Mission San Fernando (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1968), p. 5.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 10, quoting J. Torrey Connor, "The Old Basket-weaver of San Fernando," Overland Monthly, XXXI (January, 1898), p. 32.

¹⁰Ibid., 7.

¹¹Perkins, "Our Valley," April 15, 1954.

¹²Ibid., April 1, 1954.

¹³Recreation and Parks, Hanks, p. 1.

¹⁴Perkins, "Our Valley," April 1, 1954, quoting from George Menley and Dr. Bizzell, "The Story of Candelaria," manuscript.

¹⁵Ibid., April 15, 1954.

¹⁶Ibid., April 1, 1954.

¹⁷Conversation with Chester King, archeological researcher at Vasquez Rocks.

¹⁸Recreation and Parks, Letter to Vasquez Rocks Study Group from Joe Prather, subject: "Decision Making Process on Vasquez Rocks Development," April 11, 1973.

CHAPTER III: THE SPANISH PERIOD

Whatever else they were, the Alliklik apparently were docile and friendly,¹ much like the Indians the Spanish encountered in the San Fernando Valley and along the Santa Clara River.

This friendliness was noted by Fr. Crespi in the diary he kept while on the Portola' expedition. On Tuesday, August 8, 1769, having crossed Fernando Pass to Newhall, the Spaniards approached a "village of heathen" who had already provided guides through the mountain passes. Crespi writes:

These poor Indians had many provisions ready to receive us....We enjoyed their good will and their presents, which consisted of some baskets of pinole, made of sage and other kinds of grasses, and at the side of these baskets they had others for us to drink from. They gave us also nuts and acorns, and were presented with beads in return.²

This meeting with the Indians occurred less than fifteen miles from Vasquez Rocks. Despite the rugged terrain, it is possible that the Alliklik, being a trading tribe with contacts in the desert and on the coast, were fully aware of the white man's presence among them. Dr. Charles Rozaire of the County Museum of Natural History is of the opinion that there was actual contact between the Alliklik and the Spanish.³ Chester King has found Spanish trade beads on the park site.

Kroeber notes that the Alliklik probably went either to San Buenaventura, founded March 31, 1782, or to San Fernando Rey de Espana, founded September 8, 1797.⁴ The move probably was voluntary.

Curiosity, at first would attract individual natives. By degrees others would overcome their timidity. The kindly consideration of the missionaries, who would distribute presents of trinkets or food among them, was communicated to those in the rancherias. Many more would be witnesses to the raising of the Mission Cross. If they lent a helping hand occasionally, at bringing timbers or stones, etc., they were richly rewarded with gifts of food or clothing. In the end, the Indians would begin to use their wits, and come to the conclusion that it was better to accept the invitation of food, than to be always hungry for lack of something to eat which would have to be sought in the mountains and valleys. By that time such Indians would be disposed to listen to what the strangers endeavored to convey by means of signs.⁵

Although communication between Spaniard and Indian began with signs, it was soon apparent that a lingua franca was needed. It was at the Mission that the Indians learned Spanish and their own languages fell into disuse. The Mission Fathers were criticized for this by some of their contemporaries. Otto von Kotzebue, an officer of the Russian Imperial Navy who visited the Missions in 1816 and 1824, "castigated the friars for not troubling themselves to learn the language of the Indians whom he categorized as 'ugly stupid, and savage'."⁶

However, there was good reason to teach the Indians Spanish.

Due to the multiplicity of Indian dialects, the Spanish language was used. Beyond the practicality of allowing the natives a central means of expressing themselves, the language served as a unifying force among tribes previously unable to communicate with one another.⁷

Within a short time, the culture of the Indian had been

modified. He learned agriculture and construction methods. His new language allowed him to speak to other Indians. Speaking brought friendship, courtship, and intermarriage. Within a generation or two, Indians born at the Mission not only did not know their ancestral language, they did not know from whence they came. In this way, the language of the Alliklik was lost.

In 1770 there were an estimated 23,500 Shoshonean Indians in California. Of these, some 16,500 made up the Southern California branch. By 1910 only 4,050 could be identified as Shoshonean.⁸ It is not surprising that such a small group as the Vasquez Rocks inhabitants should disappear entirely. However, their disappearance was the result of acculturation, not military conquest or genocide.

It has been stated that the Alliklik went either to San Buenaventura or San Fernando Missions. It is my opinion that, although San Buenaventura was founded first, the Alliklik probably went to San Fernando. I believe this because San Fernando is closer to Vasquez Rocks; it has been recorded that San Buenaventura went several years with few neophytes while Indians were known to be working on the Francisco Reyes grant before San Fernando Mission was built on that grant;⁹ there were still some identifiable Alliklik in the area early in the twentieth century (Candelaria, part Chumash and Alliklik died in 1912, leaving a manuscript written by George Manley and a Dr. Bizzell; Sinforosa, of Alliklik and

Fernandino lines, died at Newhall in 1915¹⁰; finally, a map in the possession of Newhall historian Arthur Perkins, which was drawn by H. Allen on research of R. F. Van Valkenburgh, shows an Indian rancheria at Vasquez Rocks. The map is based on the "Bishop records of Mission San Fernando Rey."¹¹

Chester King also believes the Alliklik went to San Fernando Mission, probably between 1802 and 1816.¹²

Vasquez Rocks was never part of any Spanish Grant.¹³ Although not part of San Fernando Mission proper, it is possible that Mission horses were run in the area.¹⁴

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- ⁴Beck, California, p. 51; Kroeber, Handbook, p. 613.
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- ⁷Weber, San Fernando, pp. 7-8.
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- ⁹Weber, San Fernando, p. 2.
- ¹⁰Perkins, "Our Valley," April 15, 1954.
- ¹¹Ibid., April 1, 1954.
- ¹²Conversation with Chester King.
- ¹³Recreation and Parks, Letter to Chris Jarvi from Harvey T. Brandt, subject: "Vasquez Rocks County Park Historical Study," October 11, 1973.
- ¹⁴Telephone conversation with Fr. Francis J. Weber.

CHAPTER IV: THE MEXICAN PERIOD -- GOLD DISCOVERED

The park site is near the old San Francisco Rancho, which passed into the hands of the Del Valles in 1834.¹ The Del Valle Rancho was the scene of California's first significant gold find. While there is little doubt that gold was discovered in other parts of the state before the 1840s, "the earliest discovery for which a definite date and probable location can be found is that in Placerita Canyon (less than fifteen miles from Vasquez Rocks by freeway) on March 9, 1842 ...six years before James W. Marshall, on January 24, 1848, found the glittering nuggets in Sutter's millrace near the south branch of the American River."² Another account states:

...there is conclusive testimony that the first known grain of native gold dust was found upon or near the San Francisco Ranch, about forty-five miles westerly from Los Angeles City, in the month of June, 1841. This discovery consisted of grain gold fields -- known as placer mines -- and the auriferous fields, discovered in that year, embraced the greater part of the country drained by the Santa Clara River, from a point some fifteen or twenty miles from its mouth to its sources, and easterly beyond them to Mount San Bernardino.³

(Still another account states this discovery was made on January 22, 1839 -- Weber, San Fernando, p. 41)

The details of this gold discovery are told by Abel Stearns in a letter written July 8, 1867, to Louis R. Lull, secretary of the Society of Pioneers in San Francisco:

The placer mines from which this gold was taken were first discovered by Francisco Lopez, a

native of California, in the month of March, 1842, at a place called San Francisquito, about thirty-five miles north-west from this city (Los Angeles). The circumstances of the discovery by Lopez, as related by him, are as follows: Lopez, with a companion, was out in search of some stray horses, and about midday they stopped under some trees and tied their horses out to feed, they resting under the shade; when Lopez with his sheath knife dug up some wild onions, and in the dirt discovered a piece of gold, and searching further found some more.⁴

The result of this find, on whatever date it was made, was California's first gold rush. The Placerita field was worked more or less continuously until 1846 but no definite amount of the gold taken has been determined. Hubert H. Bancroft states 2,000 ounces valued at \$38,000 were discovered by December, 1843. Other estimates range as high as \$100,000 in the first two years of the rush.⁵

In 1843 a second gold field was found in San Feliciano Canyon and Jose Salazar, the second husband of Del Valle's widow, Jacopa Feliz, took out \$43,000 in gold dust.

These discoveries continued to be made by prospectors hunting throughout the area, including in the vicinity of Vasquez Rocks. Gold mining at the Soledad camp began in earnest about 1861 with gold, silver and copper strikes being mined by the Los Angeles Copper, Gold and Silver Mining Company and others. The silver ore pinched out in a few years but there was a new gold boom at Soledad camp in 1868. On October 14 of that year, the first U.S. Post Office in the area was established at Ravenna. By 1870 the Soledad camp had passed its peak,⁶ but other finds were to be made

intermittently into the twentieth century. These mines were the principal means of income for the early residents of the Vasquez Rocks area.

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⁶Perkins, "Our Valley," August 12, 1954.

CHAPTER V: TIBURCIO VASQUEZ

At the conclusion of the Mexican War, property around and including Vasquez Rocks became Public Land administered by the United States Government. Americans were settling in the vicinity, principally in the Newhall area, and were already there in some numbers when part of the "Jayhawker" party emerged from the narrowed terminal of San Francisquito Canyon in 1849, having survived a desperate crossing of Death Valley on their journey from Galena, Illinois.¹

In the 1850s, the first stage line, operated by Alexander and Banning, began to connect the area with Fort Tejon. This stage line, a six-horse coach, followed an old Mexican pack trail through the Grapevine and San Francisquito Canyon. The route also was used by Butterfield and Overland stages to about the start of the Civil War.² 1861 - 1865

It was during this period that Vasquez Rocks acquired its most romantic local legend, even its name. The infamous Tiburcio Vasquez made his appearance in a horse-stealing raid on a ranch on the Santa Clara River in Los Angeles County on July 15, 1857. It was the bandit's first official crime.³

Local legend has this to say of Vasquez Rocks and one of the bandit's exploits:

A hundred years ago the lonely crags felt the pulse of life. Tiburcio Vasquez and his men -- and women -- (he was a notorious fellow with the girls, and his affair with the wife of one of his lieutenants eventually led to his capture and execution) found the jagged rocks ideal as a hideout from sheriff's posses. Even today, sooty traces of their fires

can be seen against certain racks that form natural fireplaces....There was a strange, ironic twist to Vasquez' involvement with his aide's wife. The hot-blooded husband shot and wounded the leader and then ran away. A little later he went to lawmen and told them the gang including Vasquez, could be found at the rocky hideout....Two posses moved in, one from the north, one from the south, and in the natural amphitheater just south of the tallest rock formation they surrounded the bandit....When it was all over, the lawmen went in to check the bodies. They found everyone but Vasquez. He wasn't there because he had gone to hide with friends in Mojave -- to recuperate from the wound the husband had given him.⁴

Like most folklore it is a good story -- and there is just enough truth in it to make it survive from one generation to another in the telling. It joins with other folklore accounts that describe Vasquez as the Robin Hood bandit of California in much the same way his predecessor, Joaquin Murietta, had been described in the popular pulp fiction of that bygone day.

Vasquez was born August 11, 1835⁵ at Monterey. In 1854 he stabbed a town constable to death at a fandango in Monterey, but he was never charged with that crime. He was, however, captured after the raid on the Los Angeles County ranch.

Indicted in Los Angeles on August 11, 1857, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to five years in San Quentin prison. On June 25, 1859, he escaped.⁶

Vasquez, apparently learning his trade by trial and error, again failed at horse-stealing, this time in Amador County, and was returned to San Quentin prison on August 17, 1859. This time he completed his sentence and was released on August 13, 1863.⁷

On his release from prison, Vasquez went to the quick-silver mines at New Almaden in Santa Clara County where he became a professional gambler while keeping his hand in as a murderer and thief. One morning an Italian butcher was found stabbed to death and \$400 in cash known to be in his possession was missing. Vasquez was hired by Santa Clara County Sheriff John H. Adams to serve as interpreter at the inquest which produced the following statement: "The deceased came to his death from a pistol bullet, fired by some person or persons unknown." A short time later Vasquez vanished. Several days afterwards Adams was told that Vasquez and another man had committed the murder and robbery. However, the evidence was not deemed sufficient to warrant pursuit and Vasquez was never charged with that murder.

In 1864-66 Vasquez was associated with Tomas Redondo, known as Procopio and as Dick of the Red Hand, in Alameda County. In 1867 Vasquez was arrested for cattle stealing in Sonoma County and entered San Quentin prison for the third time on January 18, 1867. He was discharged on June 4, 1870.⁸

An incident which may explain part of Vasquez' Robin Hood image occurred in 1871 during a raid on the San Joaquin River town of Firebaugh's Ferry. Vasquez had been told that cattle baron Henry Miller had deposited \$30,000 in the safe there to pay his employes. Arriving at the Ferry with six men, Vasquez discovered that Miller had not deposited the money. He then decided to rob the store, tying up twelve people and going through their pockets. The following allegedly was told by Vasquez himself:

I took a watch away from a man named the Captain. His wife saw me, and coming up, threw her arms around my neck and begged me to return the watch; that her husband had given it to her during their courtship, and she couldn't bear to part with it. I gave it to her, and then she said, "Come with me." I followed her into another room, and from behind the chimney she took out another watch and gave it to me. The Captain said, "You haven't got a bad heart, after all!"⁹

The same story has been repeated with variations in several accounts of Vasquez.

Another account which may have added to his reputation happened the same year when Vasquez stopped the New Idria stage in San Benito County in order to rob it. After ordering everyone out of the stage, he then ordered everyone back in and sent it on its way, robbing no one.

To an uninformed passenger aboard the stage, this may have seemed like a generous act. However, there was good reason for Vasquez's apparent turn of mind. His gang at that time was hiding out in La Cantua Canyon near the New Idria mines. Vasquez had an agreement with the mine operators that he would not harm them or their property and they in return would not give information as to his whereabouts. A passenger on the stage was the superintendent at the New Idria mines and in not robbing the stage Vasquez was merely keeping a bargain that was beneficial to himself.¹⁰

It has also been noted that Mexicans in California never divulged his presence among them to American lawmen. This has been disputed. One contemporary newspaper story claims that Los Angeles Sheriff W. R. Rowland had "a little bird" that kept

him informed of Vasquez movements around Los Angeles.¹¹ If true, this "little bird" almost certainly sang in Spanish. It was this "little bird" who was credited with Vasquez eventual capture. But Vasquez had his "little birds," also, and they were so effective that the posse that captured Vasquez had to leave Los Angeles one man at a time and gather at a corral on the outskirts of the city, their rifles and other weapons being taken there in a dray.¹² It is probably true that Vasquez was protected by some Mexicans living in California at the time. To such, Vasquez was the agent of their revenge against those Yankees who had reduced the native Californios to second-class citizens despite the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the Mexican War. Vasquez, along with Joaquín Murieta, became a folk hero of his time.

Vasquez had a reputation as a ladies' man, earned partly by the number of women who visited him in his cell during his last days at San Jose. This popularity may have been abetted by contemporary newsmen who, once Vasquez was safely tucked away in a jail cell, began to discover many good qualities about him, even discovering he was a poet.¹³

There is no disputing that Vasquez was brave. Newspaper accounts of his trial tell again and again of his dignity and courage. He apparently faced the hangman's noose with calm, if not serenity. He was fairly well educated for his time, being able to read and write both English and Spanish. Descriptions of him differ, but he was probably of average height and weight with fair skin set off by dark hair.

One description is that he was of medium stature, well-knit and wiry, weighing about 140 or 150 pounds. "His complexion was much lighter than the ordinary Mexican. His features were clear cut, with an intelligent expression. His eyes were rather large and of a light gray or blue color. His forehead was high and his head well shaped."

An official description furnished to a San Francisco newspaper of the period states:

A low forehead, and head of coarse black hair are little indications of intelligence, and from beneath a coarse, overhanging brow gleam two deep-set, treacherous, cunning eyes, of which even a Madagascar cat would be ashamed. The whole contour of his face suggests Indian blood; his cheek bones are high, his mouth large and coarse, his beard and mustache...are of straight, black hair, and so far from relieving, only serve to render more repulsive his ugly countenance. He stands 5 feet 5 3/4 inches high, and is of good figure, proportionally, but with large hands -- an unusual feature in those of Spanish blood.¹⁴

With that description it is not surprising that Vasquez was not captured in San Francisco. Photographs of him taken at Los Angeles and San Jose are of a not unattractive man with rather pleasant features. Sheriff Adams' description of Vasquez agrees more with the first account except that Adams said the eyes were dark brown. He agrees with the height given in the second account.¹⁵

It appears that Vasquez was attractive to the ladies and the folklore account given concerning the events at Vasquez Rocks apparently is concocted from two events in Vasquez' life.

The first occurred after Vasquez was released from San Quentin in 1870. Returning to Monterey County, he stayed for a time with a family named Salazar in the town of San Juan. It is said that Vasquez abducted the willing Mrs. Salazar one night and took her to the town of Natividad. He abandoned her after a few days. Some days later, Vasquez met Salazar on the streets of San Juan. After heated words, Vasquez drew his Navy revolver but it misfired. Salazar, however, got a shot off, hitting Vasquez in the neck, the bullet coming out below the shoulder. Vasquez escaped and Salazar swore out a warrant of attempted murder against him.¹⁶

The second incident is more closely associated with Vasquez Rocks. While hiding out near the New Idria mines, Vasquez recruited a Chilian blacksmith named Abdon Leiva into the gang. Leiva had a lovely wife, Rosaria. Apparently the attraction between Rosaria and Vasquez was mutual and soon Vasquez began to send Leiva on a variety of missions while he and Rosaria dallied. It was from New Idria that the Vasquez gang launched one of its more bloody forays, the raid on Tres Pinos.

The bandits set out to rob Andrew Snyder's store and stagecoach way station at Tres Pinos on August 26, 1873. Getting the drop on the ten or twelve occupants of the store, the bandits tied them up and began looting. The first person killed was a Portuguese sheepherder named Bernal Berhuri who did not halt when ordered and was shot. The next was a deaf teamster, George Redford, who possibly did not understand what

was going on. When the shooting started, Leander Davidson, landlord of the hotel next to the store, tried to close the hotel door and was shot through the chest. He died instantly in the arms of his wife.¹⁷

After the raid Vasquez prevailed on Leiva to sell his ranch in La Cantua Canyon and move with the gang into southern California. It was in Little Rock Creek Canyon, east of Acton, that Leiva discovered Vasquez and Rosaria were lovers.

Later, Vasquez was to tell a reporter of the "Los Angeles Express":

A criminal intimacy had existed between myself and Leiva's wife long before I left the ranch in Monterey County. But Leiva never suspicioned us. At Rock Creek he caught us in fragrante delicto.^(sic) He turned against me then, and sought to have me captured. Leiva had been with me a long time prior to the Tres Pinos murders.¹⁸

On catching them together, Leiva drew his pistol and would have shot Vasquez but was told by one of the bandits, Cleovaro Chavez, "Drop that gun or I'll blow your brains out." Leiva challenged Vasquez to a duel but was told 5h343 2qw no point in adding to a wrong that was already done. Leiva then took his wife to Jim Heffner's ranch near Elizabeth Lake, a favorite hiding place of the Vasquez band.

Leaving his wife with Heffner, Leiva surrendered to Under-Sheriff W. W. Jenkins of Los Angeles at Lyon's Station and informed on Vasquez, who in the meantime, had gone to Heffner's ranch and taken Rosaria away.

Acting on Leiva's information, Captain Adams and Sheriff Rowland tracked Vasquez and sighted him with Chavez. A

spirited gun fight followed but Vasquez and Chavez escaped unhurt. This is probably the gun battle said to have taken place at Vasquez Rocks in local folk tales. However, one source places it in Little Rock Creek Canyon¹⁹ and another in Rock Creek Canyon in San Bernardino County.²⁰

Vasquez later left Rosaria, pregnant and destitute, to make her own way out of the mountains to San Jose where she reported she had been kidnaped and told a story of miscarriaging in the wilderness.

Whatever the differences between folklore and contemporary accounts, there can be no doubt that Vasquez operated extensively in the area around Elizabeth Lake and Soledad Canyon from the time of the Tres Pinos raid until his capture at Greek George's place near Cahuenga Pass on May 13, 1874, after his robbery at the Repetto Ranch near San Gabriel.

Vasquez apparently had a brother living at Soledad Canyon and was able to move freely about the area using the alias "Ricardo Cantuga."²¹ Vasquez has been definitely placed at Heffner's Ranch at Elizabeth Lake. A line drawn from Elizabeth Lake to Soledad Canyon passes directly through Vasquez Rock Park. Without claiming that Vasquez and his band often traveled in straight lines, it seems a safe assumption that at one time or another he was in the rocks that now bear his name as well as in nearby Vasquez Canyon. It is even possible that the folklore account may be the true location of the gun fight and escape. If Vasquez ever used the rocks as a hideout, it must have been for a very short time. He had access to too

many ranches in the area for him to remain very long huddled in the rocks. Still, local legend persists that the tallest outcropping of the Vasquez Rocks formation was the vantage point from which a lookout kept watch for intruders while Vasquez and his gang camped among the rocks below.

According to Mrs. Ray Toney, former owner of part of the park site, "a lot of people have looked for gold supposed to be hidden by Vasquez around here. Of course they never found any. Vasquez didn't have any money, he spent it all on women."²²

Vasquez was hanged at San Jose on March 19, 1875, after being sent there for trial from Los Angeles.

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- ²Ibid., June 10, 1954.
- ³Robert Greenwood in George Beers, The California Outlaw, Tiburcio Vasquez (Los Gatos: The Talisman Press, 1960), p. 18.
- ⁴Gordon Grant, "Badman's Rocky Hideout Becomes a Park," Los Angeles Times, October 30, 1965, quoting Ernest Burwell, Vasquez Rocks County Park ranger.
- ⁵Greenwood in California Outlaw, p. 14. Although various other sources place his birth date anywhere from 1835 to 1840, Beers, for example, says 1838.
- ⁶Ibid., 18-21.
- ⁷Ibid., 21.
- ⁸Ibid., 21-22.
- ⁹Ibid., 26.
- ¹⁰Ibid., 25-26.
- ¹¹M. F. Hoyle, Crimes and Career of Tiburcio Vasquez, Murieta and Vasquez (Hollister: Evening Free Lance, 1927), p. 19.
- ¹²Beers, California Outlaw, p. 260.
- ¹³Greenwood in California Outlaw, p. 46.
- ¹⁴Hoyle, Vasquez, p. 5.
- ¹⁵Greenwood in California Outlaw, p. 15.
- ¹⁶Ibid., 22-23.
- ¹⁷Beers, California Outlaw, pp. 183-184.
- ¹⁸Greenwood in California Outlaw, p. 37.
- ¹⁹Ibid., 35-37.
- ²⁰Hoyle, Vasquez, p. 15.
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- ²²Conversation with Mrs. Ray Toney.

CHAPTER VI: EARLY SETTLEMENT -- MINING

Even while Vasquez was murdering and pillaging, more law-abiding folk were settling the region. Around 1870 Henry Thomas and families named Tychsen, Muller, Penley, Champion, Cromwell, Weston, Ford and John Humphrey were establishing small ranches in Mint Canyon. "Frank Mitchell ...had his ranch in the Agua Dulce area, close to the old site of Soledad mining camp." J. F. Taylor had 200 acres near Mitchell's homestead and Humphrey began raising hogs, hay and chickens about 1887.¹ There still are Mitchells, descendants of Frank, living near Vasquez Rocks.

Many of these early settlers were miners attracted to the area by the various strikes from the mid-nineteenth century continuing into the twentieth at Acton and Bouquet and Texas, Mint, Soledad, Placerita, Haskell and Dry Canyons. The boom in Acton began in the 1860s and continued, also in Soledad Canyon, until World War II.²

Perhaps the richest of any of the gold strikes was the one at Acton, first mined in the 1880s as the New York Mine. The gold-bearing quartz vein of the New York was lost in 1897 and the mine was closed. It was reopened as the Governor Mine in 1932. Its total output was more than \$1.5 million.³ A gold mill was constructed at Acton Junction and in 1937 it reached sixty tons daily capacity. A larger mill was built south of Acton and 140 tons of ore were being mined and milled in twenty-four hours by 1940. The mill was dismantled and sold at auction in 1950.⁴

Throughout the early period of the Acton Rush, small amounts of plagioclase feldspar were mined in the Soledad Canyon area in a zone several miles wide and twelve miles long from Lang to Ravenna.

The Southern Pacific also provided employment. The railroad activity in the region began in the 1860s and with the completion of the Newhall Tunnel in 1876, the line was operational down Soledad Canyon from Tejon through Newhall.⁵

"In the Nineties, anything in the line of a payroll was of major importance. The homesteaders...needed something in the line of a cash crop while getting started. The Oil Fields of Pico provided steady employment for a few people."⁶

California's oil industry was born at Newhall. "Here is the site of historic No. 4, oldest and first commercially successful oil well of the West....Here was the birthplace of Standard Oil Co. of California." The oil boom started in 1865 and No. 4 was drilled in 1876 by Demetrius G. Scofield and California Star Oil Works Co., later acquired by Standard Oil. The first successful oil refinery of the West and first pipeline to transport oil also were built at Newhall in 1876-78.⁷ The search for oil spread -- without success -- to the canyons near Vasquez Rocks.

This then is a picture of the early settlers and their environment: most came as miners and then settled on small ranches, trying their luck in agriculture, horse, poultry and bee raising and supplementing their incomes at the mines, oil field or with the Southern Pacific.

As the Vasquez Rocks area was public land following the Mexican War, it became accessible under the United States Homestead Act of May 20, 1862. The first recorded deed on the park itself was to Bertha Wilkins for 160 acres on November 11, 1898.⁸

Perhaps the best description of the life of these pioneers can be had through reconstructing the experiences of William H. Krieg, his descendants and neighbors living on or adjacent to the Vasquez Rocks Park site. Krieg as a miner who came to the Vasquez Rocks area to work at the borate mines in nearby Tick Canyon. He settled 240 acres of the park on a deed acquired through the Homestead Act on June 27, 1919.⁹

In 1906, two prospectors, Henry Shepard and Louis Ebbenger, discovered the colemanite deposits, from which borax is extracted, while looking for gold in Tick Canyon. Commonly called the Lang Mine, it was located just off what is now Davenport Road only five miles from the Southern Pacific main line through Soledad Canyon.

The mine was acquired by Thomas Thorkildsen and Stephen T. Mather, former executives of the Pacific Coast Borax Company (later to become United States Borax & Chemical Corporation), who had left FCB in 1897 to form the Sterling Borax Company.

Production began in October, 1908, and five miles of narrow-gauge railroad connected the mine to the Southern Pacific station at Lang.¹⁰ The colemanite was mined through two vertical shafts, each 350 feet deep. The workings were on the 100, 200 and 300-foot levels with auxiliary openings along a

strike distance of 800 to 1,000 feet.¹¹ About eighty men were employed at the mine, including Krieg and his nephew Ray Toney, father of Edward Toney who eventually sold the former Krieg holding to the County.

Daily production at the mine was about 400 tons. In 1914 the output neared \$500,000 but this was slowed during World War I due to a shortage of railroad cars.¹²

While the Lang Mine was in operation, a stone house was built at Agua Dulce springs on the Vasquez Rocks Park site, probably by Krieg and Charles Hanawalt, another settler near Vasquez Rocks. This house became the headquarters for the Sterling Company,¹³ probably because it was the best source of water in the area. A wagon road connecting Acton and Lang ran through Escondido Canyon on the southern edge of the park,^{14*} not far from the house. One settler near the Sterling headquarters was known to be a wagon builder for the mining company, and parts of an old wagon, believed to have been used at the mine, remain near the house today.

While the mine was in operation, Vasquez Rocks was hearth and home to a pair of characters, father and son, called Stonehatchet who lived in caves near Escondido Canyon. The younger of the pair was about 30 in 1920. They are believed to have lived in the caves at least five years and both were employed at Lang Mine. They left the area when the mine closed.¹⁵

* There is some disagreement on whether the house was actually headquarters for the mine and whether the wagon road in Escondido Canyon connected Acton and Lang. Thomas Asher and Edward Toney believe the house was the headquarters. U.S. Borax records make no mention of it and Mrs. Ray Toney says the house was built after the mine closed. Edward Toney said the Escondido Canyon road connected Acton and Lang and served the headquarters. Mrs. Ray Toney believes the road was built for motion pictures.

In 1911, the Sterling Company was acquired by Pacific Coast Borax for \$1.8 million. Sterling continued to operate the Lang Mine, however, for the next ten years as a subsidiary of PCB.¹⁶

At the close of World War I, Ray Toney returned from Marine Corps service and joined his future wife and uncle at the Lang Mine. (Mrs. Toney, who had known her future husband since their childhood in Colorado, was at that time living in a cabin near Lang.) Ray Toney remained employed there until the mine closed in 1922. It was dismantled in 1926. During its heyday, Lang Mine produced 100,000 tons of ore valued at \$3 million.¹⁷

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- ²Ibid., August 5, 1954.
- ³Gay, Mines, p. 469.
- ⁴Ibid., 498.
- ⁵Perkins, "Our Valley," August 12, 1954.
- ⁶Ibid., November 11, 1954.
- ⁷Ibid., August 26, September 2, September 16, 1954.
- ⁸Department of County Engineer, Mapping Division.
- ⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰(Joe V. Kern), 100 Years of U.S. Borax, 1872-1972
(Los Angeles: U.S. Borax & Chemical Corp., 1972), p. 29.
- ¹¹Gay, Mines, p. 507.
- ¹²Ibid., 508.
- ¹³Conversation with Thomas Asher.
- ¹⁴Conversation with Edward Toney.
- ¹⁵Conversation with Mrs. Ray Toney.
- ¹⁶Kern, 100 Years, p. 29.
- ¹⁷Gay, Mines, p. 508.

CHAPTER VII: MOTION PICTURES

According to Mrs. Ray Toney, who still lives in the area, many of the miners followed PCB to Death Valley when its operations were moved in 1922. Others, Krieg, Ray Toney and Charles Hanawalt included, remained on their homesteads trying to make a living as best they could.

Hanawalt, who continued in the area up to the late 1920s (he still has children there), lived almost exclusively off the land after the mine closed, supplementing his income as a stonemason. Mrs. Ray Toney said Hanawalt built nearly all the stone fireplaces in the surrounding area. According to Edward Toney, Hanawalt probably was as responsible as anyone for the depletion of game at Vasquez Rocks because he was an extensive hunter and trapper.

Krieg raised chickens and cows on the property and grew pears in the flat area below the rocks after the mine was closed. He also was a timber man and earned money building wooden bridges for the County. Recognizing the recreational aspects of his property, Krieg managed it as a park, putting in picnic benches and charging 50 cents admission to visitors.

Meanwhile, another industry was booming in California that was to provide added income to Krieg.

Early in the twentieth century the motion picture industry became aware that scenes from all over the world could be duplicated in California. By 1911 the Kalem Company had located near Glendale and was filming Western and Indian pictures

in the nearby foothills.¹ As Los Angeles grew into that urban sprawl that has been called a hundred suburbs in search of a city, the filmmakers pushed deeper into the hills for settings.

Although Vasquez Rocks is not listed among the California locations recorded at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles, many action films were made there.

In the 1920s Krieg began leasing the property to motion picture companies and it was not long before the skirl of bagpipes and measured commands of the British Army in India were heard equally with the Western drawl of the cowboy at Vasquez Rocks. Krieg continued his various activities there until his death on May 24, 1937. After that, the film leasing and recreational park use was continued by his nephew, Ray Toney. Besides managing the various enterprises at Vasquez Rocks, Toney generously gave small parcels on the eastern edge of the park to his friends for summer cottages.

It was on the flat area in front of the rock formations that Errol Flynn led the British Lancers to glory and death in Warner Bros.' "Charge of the Light Brigade" in 1936. The year before, Gary Cooper eluded Afghan marksmen amid the rocks in Paramount's "Lives of a Bengal Lancer." And it was among the rocks that the Highland Light Infantry scampered to rescue Victor MacLaglin, Cary Grant and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. from the murderous worshippers of Kali in the class "Gunga Din."

But Vasquez Rocks was not totally colonized by the British. The flat plain became alternately a Western settlement, Mexican

town or Indian village for numerous Westerns, including the "Cisco Kid" series and spanning an era from William S. Hart to Glenn Ford with generous helpings of Buck Jones, Richard Dix, Roy Rogers and Gene Autry along the way.

Movie use of the site declined during World War II because of the gasoline shortage but picked up again after the war. Principal users of the property were Monogram and Paramount studios.

With the advent of television, the British returned with a series, "Lives of a Bengal Lancer." A mud fort used in the series stood on the level plain from the mid 1950s into the 1960s. Westerns made their return in the "Have Gun Will Travel," "Bonanza," and "Gunsmoke" series. Even out-of-this-world adventure, as in the "Star Trek" series, was filmed at the rocks.

Filmmaking is still going on there, one of the more recent being a television commercial for a syrup maker.

In 1934 Jefferson Asher bought 400 acres along the western edge of the park site, including the Sterling Company's rock house which was expanded by the Ashers to become the headquarters of the Triple A Ranch.

Jefferson Asher seems to have been right at home on this motion picture location, ranch and farm. An entrepreneur, he was not far removed from show business as general manager of Ocean Park Amusement Pier Assoc. He also managed bingo parlors and tried his hand at manufacturing candy. On the Triple A Ranch he raised alfalfa, barley, wheat, sorgum and Sudan grass. The Ashers tried running cattle there but their

forty to fifty head only had good grazing about two months a year in the early spring. The rest of the year, feed had to be purchased for the cattle.

The Ashers kept 2,000 egg hens and had a good business until the end of World War II. They also kept 200 to 300 turkeys. The hen house burned down in a bad fire at the end of World War II. It was rebuilt but business was not good.

The stone house was remodeled and additions made. Eventually a swimming pool and a house for a caretaker were added. The Ashers lived mostly in Los Angeles, returning to Vasquez Rocks in the summers and during holidays. Of the motion picture activity, Thomas Asher, son of Jefferson Asher, recalls coming out of the house one morning to find two men with drawn six-guns, stalking each other around the nearby rocks. They were being directed in their movements by a man giving orders in German. They were from a pirate television company producing Westerns for a German television series. When they had finished filming, they simply packed up and left. The filmmaking business at Vasquez Rocks did not always include a profit for the property owner.

Those settlers not fortunate enough to own a movie location had to make their living in other ways after the Lang Mine closed. According to Mrs. Ray Toney, some, like Hanawalt, raised turkeys and were able to earn good money at it until laws were enacted providing for inspection of poultry. During Prohibition many turned to bootlegging, including Krieg, which may account for

his property's popularity as a film location during that period. The Dyers, who own a great deal of land throughout the nearby canyons, raised bees, a profitable activity noted in Beers' book on Tiburcio Vasquez.² According to Mrs. Toney, the Dyers made a good deal of money during World War II when beeswax was used in munitions making.

Earl Casey bought some land from Krieg and tried subdividing but died March 27, 1935, having sold only a few small lots. Jim Schaeffer, a descendant of one of the pioneer families that settled most of Escondido Canyon formed the Schaeffer Land Company, which is still doing business in the area, although Schaeffer sold the company and is now believed to be living in Newport Beach.

Vasquez Rocks was not without its characters. Near the entrance to the park small pictures painted on the rocks can be found if one looks closely. They were painted by Claude Ellis, a chemist for the Fuller Paint Company, who was a constant visitor in the 1920s. He apparently was testing outdoor paint in a very artistic fashion, painting landscapes, skulls, faces and even miniature horsemen on the rocks. Edward Toney recalls that Ellis would prune juniper trees and seal the cut stubs with a colorful face rather than the usual quick swipe of paint. On his retirement, Ellis is said to have lived in a cabin made from packing crates in the rocks below the flat area until his death in 1943 or 1944.

The inspirational nature of the rock outcroppings has not been lost on local residents. About 1949 nondenominational

Easter Sunrise services began to be held at the rocks. In 1964 the Tri-Canyon Kiwanis Club became a sponsor with the Soledad Township Ministerial Alliance. The services feature chorus and instrumental music from ensembles at local schools. These services are still held each Easter.

Despite the apparent success of the motion picture lease arrangement, Ray Toney still considered himself a miner and he and his son, Edward Toney, prospected the nearby canyons. Edward Toney tells of finding \$500 in gold dust by cleaning dirt from a cracked slab at an old Indian ceremonial site near the park. Hunting, too, was good until about the time the Antelope Valley Freeway was put in. There are no deer to be seen among the rocks today but at one time they were there in abundance.

In the 1960s taxes on the property became too great a burden and overtures were made to the County expressing a willingness to sell the land for a park. The final purchase was made in 1970 after about \$1 million had been paid, mostly to Edward Toney, Jefferson Asher Jr., and Thomas Asher, heirs to the bulk of the park site.

The Vasquez Rocks seem to have a firm hold on their owners, past and present, and on some visitors as well.

Thomas Asher still likes to return and tramp over the rocks that were his playground as a youth, although he says it is painful for him to look at the old ranch house, damaged beyond repair in the February, 1971, earthquake and since vandalized by inconsiderate park visitors. It is earmarked for destruction by the County. Edward Toney and his family

still live on property they own adjacent to the park. Toney seems to have inherited the energy to do more than one thing to earn his livelihood. During the week he is employed by the Newhall Land and Farming Company but most weekends he can be found tending the small store about a half mile from the park site.

On a rock bluff overlooking most of the park there is a small metal plate on which is inscribed:

Eva J. McBride Brown
1904 - 1928

She was a member of the McBride family which once homesteaded the property immediately east of the park. Another bluff, closer to the entrance, bears three plates:

Henry Krieg
Born 1869 Died May 24, 1937

Ida M. Krieg Faubert
Feb. 13, 1865 April 29, 1933
Age 68
Wife, Mother, Sister

Earl Casey
Nov. 8, 1886 March 27, 1935

Like the Allikliks before them, their ashes have been deposited in the rocks they loved.

According to Edward Toney, Casey's ashes have been moved from under the marker that bears his name. However, Toney adds that his grandparents are buried in the rocks.

And the story is told of Bill Ellis, son of the rock painter and recluse, Claude Ellis, who went so far as to fake the spreading of his at sea so that his girl friend could bring them to Vasquez Rocks and loose them to the wind.³

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¹Richard V. Spencer, "Los Angeles as a Production Center," The Moving Picture World, April 8, 1911, p. 768.

²Beers, California Outlaw, pp. 252-253.

³Conversation with Edward Toney.

CONCLUSION

In buying Vasquez Rocks for a park, the County has made a sizable investment in a unique natural formation. It is my opinion that development of the park should only enhance this natural formation.

The history of Vasquez Rocks suggests five themes for development. They are the Indians who once lived there; the folklore of Tiburcio Vasquez and his alleged connection with the rocks; mining; motion picture making, and -- most important -- the rocks themselves. Approaching the rocks from any direction, one passes a variety of scenery, small towns, small ranches, some barren spots, but nothing to prepare one for the visual impact of the rocks that can only be experienced when very near the park.

It is my opinion that development should include modern restrooms and drinking facilities, some cover for picnickers, a small museum, snack bar and curio shop, and natural rock trash containers.

The museum, snack bar and curio shop should be at one location where they will not obscure or detract from the wilderness aspects of the park. The best location, I believe, is the site of the Asher house on the western boundary. A trail could connect a natural rock structure there to the main part of the park. From that building, a trail could be constructed through the sites of Indian habitation. Access to the Indian sites should be public but controlled. The pictographs should be preserved. (There is some urgency in this

as children with BB guns already have chipped away some of the pictographs as well as parts of some of the paintings of (Claude Ellis near the park entrance.) Perhaps a guided tour could take visitors among the sites with the guide pointing out specific areas of interest and explaining how the Indians lived before the coming of the Spaniards. The natural vegetation, such as "Indian barley," juniper and other edible and medicinal plants could be pointed out and their use explained. Inside the museum, dioramas could depict Indian life as it was when they lived among the rocks. Artifacts from the site could be displayed along with reconstructed items. If an arrowhead flint is displayed, a completed bow and arrow should be part of the exhibit.

Outside the ranch house are the remains of a wagon believed to have been used at the Lang Mine in nearby Tick Canyon. A reconstructed wagon could be installed there. Inside the museum, displays from the mining days could be on view. Of particular interest might be the apparatus used in placer or dry washing gold out of the dirt. I don't believe many city dwellers are familiar with the way gold is separated from dirt without the use of water so this display should be educational as well as entertaining. Old photographs of the mining operations and other exhibits could be displayed, perhaps on a rotating basis.

The motion picture industry could be represented by still photographs, costumes and various camera equipment used over the years. If feasible, a small theater could be attached to the museum and film clips of early motion pictures in which

Vasquez Rocks can be identified could be screened on a scheduled basis. Perhaps a film strip on the making of a movie or commercial at the rocks could be shown as well. This theater could also be used as a meeting room-lecture hall if desirable.

The Tiburcio Vasquez legend should be kept alive through displays, reading material and other means. One idea comes to mind: if the museum were segmented, the different rooms could be identified by names associated with Vasquez, i.e., the Cleovaro Chavez snack bar, or the Bill Rowland theater.

The curio shop could contain reading material on Vasquez, California Indians, mining operations and rock hunting, rock samples from the region could be polished, identified and sold, anything that is compatible with the location could be offered.

The park itself should be left in its natural state as much as is possible. The flat plain near the rocks should contain restrooms and picnic facilities that are not intrusive. Shade should be provided by cover that is compatible with the surroundings. I do not believe trees that are not natural to the site should be planted. A motion picture location should not be reconstructed there. If a guided burro ride or something of that nature is feasible or desirable a corral could be built on the flat plain but care should be taken that odors do not offend picnickers.

Within the rocks themselves trails could be provided but improvements should be kept to a minimum, perhaps only guide posts to the main camp and picnic area or to the more inspiring rock formations and vistas. Scattered throughout the rocks

should be trash containers. In my hikes there I have seen beer and soft drink cans scattered about. Perhaps trash containers would encourage visitors not to litter the site. However, these trash containers should be of natural rock, perhaps identified by a small sign. They should not be made of a material that would detract from the wilderness image.

Maps should be provided showing the trails to the main camp and picnic areas, the museum, restrooms, drinking facilities and trash containers should be marked.

In summary, development of the park should enhance and not obscure the reason for its existence in the first place, that is, the unique rock formation itself. It is an ideal wilderness park and should remain so. Care should be taken that the park is not commercialized to the extent that it becomes another Calico. Its history is not that of a mining town or settled area, but of a remote area of natural beauty. While facilities should be provided for campers and casual visitors to obtain maximum enjoyment and, if they desire, maximum educational benefit from their stay, these facilities should be built in such a way and at such locations that they blend with natural surroundings and do not constitute an obstruction or become separate attractions in themselves. The theme then should be unity and naturalness.

VASQUEZ ROCKS CHRONOLOGY

Upper Eocene - Lower Miocene: Vasquez Series formed by violent earth movement. Volcanic action, receding waters leaves mineral deposits.

200 B.C. - 1800 A.D.: Vasquez Rocks inhabited by Alliklik Indians.

1800 - 1816: Alliklik Indians absorbed by the Mission system and disappear.

1834 - 1922: Extensive mining activity throughout the area during this period. Settlement by Americans begins about 1870. Tiburcio Vasquez and his gang in the vicinity, 1873-74. Oil fields begin producing and Southern Pacific Railroad comes through about 1876. Lang Mine closes 1922.

1922 - Present: Motion picture activity at Vasquez Rocks begins and continues with production of television films and commercials today. Recreational aspects of the rocks exploited. Park developed in 1970 and land acquisition for park purposes continues.

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